

Stromquist, N., & Samoff, J. (2000). Knowledge management systems: On the promise and actual forms of information technologies. *British Association for International and Comparative Education*, 30(3), 323-332.

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In their article, *Knowledge Management Systems: On the Promise and Actual Forms of Information Technologies*, Stromquist and Samoff (2000) critically examine the role of Knowledge Management Systems (KMS) in education. Stromquist and Samoff (2000) define a KMS as a system "which proposes to produce easily retrievable materials via the Internet and hypertext". KMS attempts to be more than a mere data bank, for it seeks to provide highly selected and targeted knowledge. For its implementation, KMS depends on a manager to determine what constitutes 'relevant' and 'best' evidence" (p. 323). In a KMS, the manager controls the production and organization of information (Stromquist & Samoff, 2000).

The authors consider the use of Knowledge Management Systems as a means to provide increased access to a diversity of information and knowledge, which can then be tailored to solve specific problems world-wide, problematic (Stromquist & Samoff, 2000). Their primary concerns centralize around the issues of power, control, and access to technology, which ultimately shape the creation, use, and dissemination of specific types of information and knowledge. The authors maintain that knowledge, particularly, knowledge in the Social Sciences, loses meaning and value when fragmented and devoid of context (Stromquist & Samoff, 2000).

In the article, Stromquist and Samoff critically examine the "knowledge bank" originally proposed for development by the World Bank in 1997. World Bank's KMS, now a reality, is titled "Knowledge Sharing" and is located at: <http://www.worldbank.org/ks/km.html> (Retrieved from the World Wide Web on May 23/2003). The World Bank's Knowledge Sharing Site, among other purposes, provides users with information pertaining to a variety of development issues, including environmental and human right concerns, attempts to foster communities of practice, and provides access to advisory services (Stromquist & Samoff, 2000). The ultimate goal of the World Bank in creating the KMS was to become "the worlds premier resource of all development knowledge by the year 2000" (World Bank, as cited in Stromquist and Samoff, 2000, p. 326). While the World Banks' Knowledge Sharing site has in all likelihood changed from its initial conception and grown, the questions and concerns the authors raise remain invaluable. Stromquist and Samoff (2000) raise four questions for reflection when considering not only the development and use of Knowledge Management Systems, but also the use of technology in education on the whole. These questions are as follows:

Who decides what is valuable knowledge?

Stromquist and Samoff (2000) argue that powerful institutions that have the financial resources to develop and sustain KMS will ultimately control the production and organization of information. The authors maintain, "those in charge of creating KMS databases will not be neutral but will express preferences for the kinds of knowledge that they or their organizations consider important, valid or relevant" (Stromquist & Samoff, 2000, p. 327). The process of collecting and organizing knowledge will not be democratic and collaborative, but rather controlled and restrictive in nature (Stromquist & Samoff, 2000). In addition, the value place on traditional forms of knowledge and research may take precedence over the knowledge and understandings possessed by marginalized groups (Stromquist & Samoff, 2000).

What will be quality research?

The authors also question the type and quality of research included in Knowledge Management Systems given that the rich and powerful elites often control these systems (Stromquist and Samoff, 2000). According to Stromquist and Samoff (2000), "Decisions about what to include in official knowledge databases will be defended on the basis of claims about reliability, validity and generalizability, with little critical attention accorded" to the research problem identified, the research methodologies used, the analysis of the data, and the conclusions drawn. (p. 328).

What will become knowledge?

The authors question the value and usefulness in reducing complex research studies to brief summaries. Stromquist and Samoff (2000) argue that in doing so "the complexities and ambiguities of the everyday world disappear and knowledge becomes decontextualised and disembodied" (p. 328). The authors' argument however would have been strengthened further if examples from World Bank's Knowledge Management System had been provided. The authors also question the assumption that the reorganization of information and 'increased' accessibility of information via the World Wide Web will improve the society's ability to better deal with global issues (Stromquist & Samoff, 2000).

Will all interested parties have equal access?

The authors address the issue of access to technology and the Internet, raising concerns around the growing and ever-present digital divide, which separates the wealthy from the poor on local, national, and international levels. Unequal access to information and communication technologies, not only impinges on the ability of marginalized groups to obtain information, but also impedes on their ability to contribute information to Knowledge Management Systems (Stromquist & Samoff, 2000). According to the Stromquist and Samoff (2000), the majority of information available on the Web is American.

Stromquist and Samoff (2000) conclude, "if already hegemonic international agencies position themselves in the role of knowledge arbiters, we might be crafting a future in which homogeneous knowledge from a single conceptual perspective and methodological approach prevail" (p. 331). Stromquist and Samoff's work is theoretically grounded in the work of Foucault and Castells. The article provides some invaluable considerations for

those using Knowledge Management Systems and the Internet in general as educational tools. Providing alternative examples of where the Internet has been harnessed by educational institutes to foster social justice using democratic and collaborative processes would have strengthened the authors' argument even further providing the readers with a sense of possibility.

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